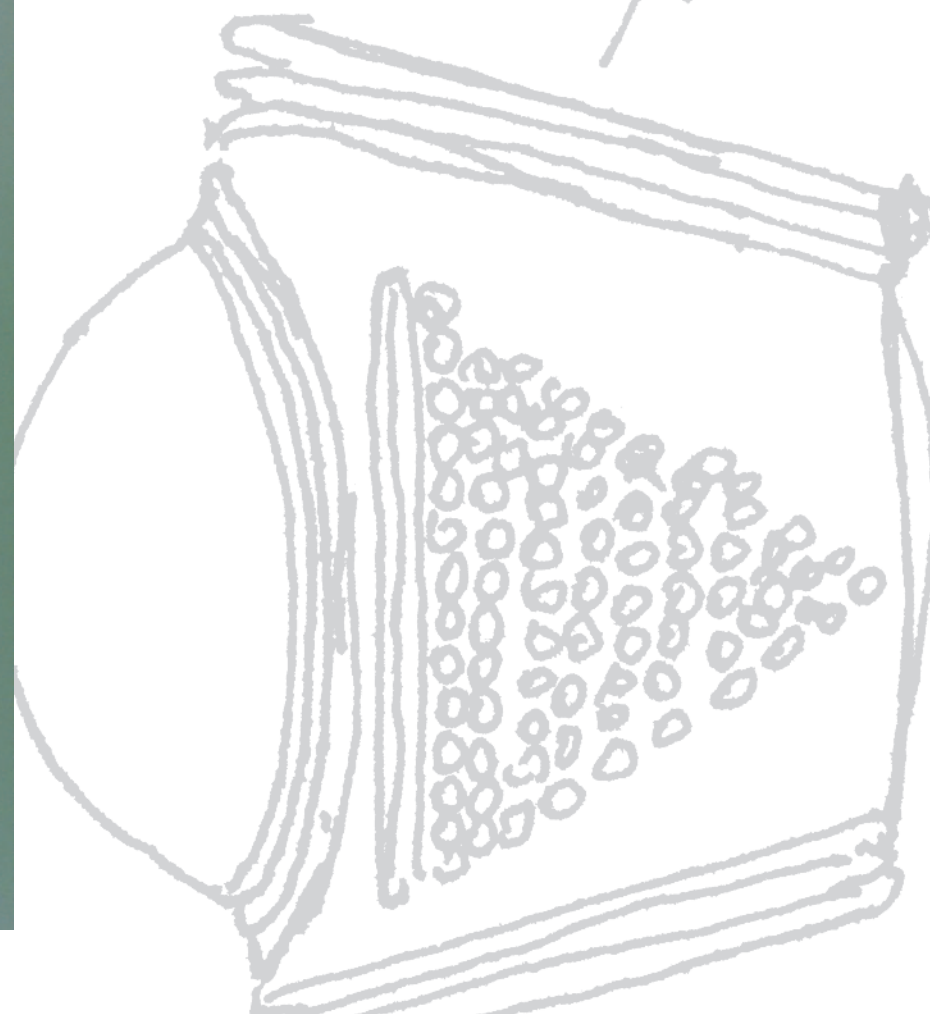


Timeless Treasures

Aliani



Out of a bright, sunny studio in Soho in downtown New York, spin orbs of gold, amulets of crystal and diamond, yards of shiny gold links, charms and pendants, glittering rings. They're destined to adorn women all over the world, who see themselves reflected in the uniqueness of the piece, and at the center of this international whirlwind of creation is Temple St. Clair: designer, scholar, mother, and world traveler extraordinaire. Though she describes herself as a Southern girl, and speaks with an accent to match even after years up north, the sweet tea and magnolia blooms were just the background to a life that has long been out of the ordinary.

As a girl, St. Clair attended boarding school in Switzerland, perfecting her French and mixing with girls from all over the world, and then as a student at Smith, switched to Italian in order to study abroad longer. She returned to Florence for a masters' degree in Italian literature, and unexpectedly encountered her life's work when her mother asked her to have an antique Italian coin set into a necklace. The goldsmiths in Florence, she found, opened up a whole new world to her and her sketches. "They work in a traditional way, everything done by hand," she says, remembering that, "It took them some time to get used to me, I tried for a little while to learn how to make jewelry myself, but I realized I could never catch up, so now they produce my designs." Her designs are well-suited to this kind of craftsmanship, borrowing as they do



from ancient cultures and art – not just Italian, but Greek, Roman, and the ancient cultures of Byzantium and the Etruscans. Educated in absorbing other cultures from the time of her travels as a young girl, St. Clair takes inspiration from many aspects of what she sees, sometimes reproducing details from jewelry depicted in paintings, to abstract effects and colors in ancient mosaics. The stones she uses are referred to in the jewelry industry as “semi-precious,” but she feels the term is a misnomer: “I seek out rare and unusual stones that are of great quality, and nearly all natural stones,” meaning not heat-treated to enhance their color, which are extremely rare in today’s market, particularly among traditionally valued stones like emeralds and sapphires, but extending to many colored gems. “The stones I used are sourced from all over the world and I love that aspect of search and discovery; I feel they’re more special than some precious stones.”

In her latest collection, St. Clair turned to aquamarines, sapphires, and is most excited by her latest discovery, the Paraiba tourmaline. “It’s this incredible blue-green color, but it can go almost turquoise; it’s named for the mine in Brazil where it was discovered. They’re real one-of-a-kinds, so I wanted to do something really special with it,” the end result being a stunning statement bracelet. In a departure

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from the antiquarian patterns and lines of the majority of her collection, this season evokes another part of St. Clair's fascinating history—her time spent working on Project Ocean Search with Jean-Michael Cousteau, son of Jacques Cousteau. A life-long scuba diver, St. Clair was just a teenager when she joined the project, diving day and night to take macro photos of coral, sea creatures, and plankton, all the tiny details her artists' eye was drawn to from the beginning. Her color palette has from the beginning incorporated the blues and greens of the ocean, and this season, inspired by Matisse's freeform cut-outs, she has let the asymmetrical, organic lines of her imagination run free over her various pieces. This includes, of course, her signature rock-crystal amulets, which have been part of her collection from the beginning (she still wears the first one she ever made every day), and more than anything symbolize the kind of role that St. Clair has cast for jewelry in her life: a talisman, a symbol, to be given or received or bought for yourself to carry with you throughout your life. "I've always been a fan of Matisse's cutouts, which were very late in his life, because they're very free and whimsical, just about enjoying color and shape—it was fun for me."

She produces two collections a year for a variety of retailers, from small but trendsetting specialty boutiques to major retailers like Saks, Neiman Marcus, and Barneys New York, and as far-flung as TSUM in Moscow and stores in Dubai and Lebanon. With such a diverse base of clients to satisfy she's found that the key is to remain true to her aesthetic that's brought her success—that authentic blend of history, artistry, and imagination. "My collections are always seasonal and different," she says, "but I see these pieces as a strong part of the line, new classics." While the inspiration for this line, in stores in February, may have come from the depths of the ocean and the art museums of Europe, who knows from where this perpetual traveler will bring back her next inspiration? Having just returned from Christmas in Italy, visiting both her favorite places and her artisans there, she's traveling to Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, and Japan within the next six months, and offers perhaps a hint at the future: "I'm looking at Tibet and Bhutan right now, and I'm hoping to go soon," she says, explaining simply, "I love their colors." She's on her way to the airport in just a couple of hours, taking off from her aerie to absorb the world, and distill it down to its essence, into something as organic, as natural, as a single, perfect jewel. ■

